583^ 607 The mutuality of the rights of nkɔlɔ and nkita is well expressed in the saying, ɔmbatɛ nkɔtɛ wɛ, "possess me so that I may possess you." It is like do ut des.

583^ 607 182 (611) It is possible to judge from the preceding descriptions that the bride price has a considerable influence on family relations. Although the Nkundɔ system is clearly and manifestly patriarchal, the custom of the bride price and its logical consequences give it certain features which make one think of a matriarchy. This situation comes about quite naturally. Since the bride price is wealth it represents power in society. Through marriage this power is transferred from the husband's clan to the wife's, which is enriched in goods and persons by the bride price that has been received. In a sense, the husband is the provider of his wife's clan. And the child can truthfully maintain that his clan was enriched thanks to his father. As a matter of fact, for the Nkundɔ, this consideration above all others is the basis for their demands of whatever rights they possess in the mother's clan. [170] The relationship between a woman and her nkita and between their respective children is founded solely on the bride-price system of marriage and has nothing to do with matriarchy. (1)

1. But the above considerations may furnish one source of explanation for the origin of that family system.

Consequently, it is unnecessary to erect complicated theories or engage in tortuous speculations in order to explain the creation of this system or to justify it. It is quite simply the outcome of the payment of a bride price in valuables that are of no use except in connection with a similar purpose.

Nevertheless, although the system of the nkita is a natural and logical consequence of marriage by means of a bride price, it is not a necesary consequence. The bride price exists in all the tribes of the Congo, but it does not seem to have resulted everywhere 583^ in the institution of the nkita.

174 114 607 What has given rise to this institution among the Nkundɔ? Father Brepoels (loc. cit., p. 339) gives the following explanation:

583[b] 648 of a bride price was not at all a purchase. (2) [179]

2. One reason why Europeans were so slow in getting a realistic picture of the nature of the bride price was undoubtedly their lack of linguistic knowledge. The natives did not know the Lobangi language spoken to them first nor the Lingala used later, and so perforce in these languages they used (and still use) terms whose meaning is vague and broad. Thus they said -- and still often say -- the word sómba, "to buy," for "marriage," although their own language contains terms which are very precise.

Having gradually become informed as to the true nature of the bride price, a number of Europeans began to favor a return to the old system. Some took a radical and intransigent stand on the matters; others approached the question in a more reasonable manner, taking into account the changes that had resulted from colonization. It was perceived that the natives were not yet ready for the abolition of their ancestral laws and that marriages without a bride price rarely lasted, in part because the old sanctions had not been replaced with new measures adapted to the circumstances. Finally the government as well as the missions more or less strictly required that the matter of the bride price be settled before a "civil" or a "religious" marriage ceremony.

583[k] 182 Many Europeans wish for the abolition of the bride-price system because it seems inferior to them. And actually in the present circumstances of time and place, it does constitute an obstacle to the evolution of the natives toward a better social and moral condition. (1)

1. This is especially true of the consequences of the nkita system.

But such an abolition is neither practicable nor expedient. This system penetrates and molds, so to speak, the whole familial and social life

583 of our peoples. Its pure and simple abolition would upset their estab-
182 lished order completely. First their mentality has to change, and that end can be accomplished only gradually, since a moral change is involved. And the present state of these peoples is not sufficiently evolved for the abolition of the bride price to be beneficial. Here, if ever, the axiom: nihil leges sine moribus is valid.

000 But what might perhaps be done in that direction now is to place a limitation on the amount of the bride price. This measure should be strictly enforced to make sure that it is carried out -- although in practice its enforcement would be very difficult, for at the beginning [180], many interested parties would try to circumvent it. If good results are to be obtained, an efficacious repression of adultery and the frequency of divorce should accompany the limitation on the bride price. It would be a first step towards the ideal. Others could follow according to the extent of the natives' evolution toward a higher level of morality.

Apropos of these considerations we should like to say a few words concerning:

583 3. Traffic in bride prices
177

This term may be taken to mean two different things. It may be used to refer to a general increase in the amount of the bride price, which has reached enormous proportions since the European penetration of the area. Or it may refer to the increase in the bride price of a single woman for successive marriages, from which her family profits.

The first meaning of the term refers to a fact, namely that the amount of the bride price has increased considerably. The reason for this development is the increase in material wealth resulting from colonization. Riches are more easily acquired. But we should not exclude the role of the greed of many parents, which has also increased. It is the most important and can reach scandalous proportions in areas where the bride price is paid in European goods (money, fabrics, appliances, utensils); in such regions, as for
177, example among the riverain people of the Lower Congo, it goes up
583 to and easily exceeds 2,000 francs. Think of what this amount
965 represents, especially in times of economic depression. (1)
935

1. For the sake of comparison, here are some average figures for 1934:

10. Conclusion

182 Nkundo society was a fully alive, organic community. All of its organs functioned and were able to adjust continually to the changes in its life. Ethnically, socially-legally, and politically, they were open to every improvement. The organs with which it was built stood nearest to natural law and drew their rights and duties from it, and also the spirit which inspired them.

The facts prove that this society could survive. It arose at the source of the Lomako; in a short time it had extended itself peacefully over the whole central area of the Congo; it pressed eastward across the Lomami and Lualaba, and southward across the Kaisai /Kasai/-Sankuru, to occupy about a fifth of the present Congo at the time of the arrival of the Whites.

182 This society was open to all healthy influences and could adapt it-
177 self to all reasonable demands of civilization. It was, however, not reconcilable with what precisely is wrong in our European ideas about progress and civilization: elimination of all ethnic intermediary organs, equalization of all individuals, materialization of all life on the basis of economic competition, slave-like submission to the impersonal, unpaternal State, with that terrible pretense of freedom, of being able to do everything that is not forbidden by the State.

178 This suddenly attained freedom, which was accompanied by the
161 abolition of all the former joints of society, means the death of the Nkundo /161/ community, not only in its soul, its being, but also in its existence. The gradual depopulation, the dying out in the Middle Congo, has had repercussions now and then, even in government circles. "The Nkundo-Mongo population is melting away like snow before the sun," is the brief content of the last official report. The Waola, between the Ruki and the Ikelemba /rivers/, had in 1939 ninety deaths and three births. The official statistics of 1939 of the territory of Coquilhatville give one hundred adults for every twenty-four children. The official data of the same year for the Vicariate of Coquilhatville, with its 382, 736 inhabitants, give a ratio of 415 children to 1, 000 adults. According to these data, the whole population will be decreased by more than 50 percent by the following generation, thus dwindled to less than one-half.

Coquilhatville, 1939